

Pastor's Column

Pulling Off the Veil

Unity is a big goal for Christians. We are the bride of Christ, linked tight through our wedding vows. We are one body with Christ as our head. We are warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand. All of this points to the truth that we are to be united, joining with each other to further the kingdom of God and bring him glory. That said, we are Human. We don't think the same. We don't agree on everything. Far from it—We often hold opposite stances on the same topics while still proclaiming that we serve God under the mantle of Christianity.

For example, some Christians believe that Paul was the last apostle, the final special messenger from God. Others swear that the apostolic ministry continues to this day, special messengers appearing often, an integral part of a church group. Still others don't think that Paul was even an apostle, given that he wasn't one of Jesus' twelve close disciples.

Which view is correct?

Does it matter?

Paul was just a man, after all, instrumental messenger or not. Whether Paul was an apostle or a strong-opinioned martyr, the core gospel remains intact: Jesus came for us, died for us, and rose again for us. Paul is just a detail. Yet these details and the differences of opinion they create can form tension. They build our denominations. Denominations are groups of Christians who proclaim to believe or value similar things, though perhaps not the same things that other denominations believe or value. For example, I believe most flairs of the Baptist denomination subscribe to the idea that apostleship ended millennia ago. On the other hand, Episcopalians believe in an apostolic line still functioning. Can Christians be unified even when they contend with each other on such details?

I believe it's possible. Yet in our quest to be "unified," we sometimes settle for less. A friend of mine once told me about a church body whose goal was unity. I recall that the members were willing to worship with each other in spite of their differences of opinion, their differences in beliefs, and their different political affiliations.

I was told that their unity could be expressed in this statement: If everyone knew about the other's beliefs, they would never have worshipped with each other. Because they didn't know whether one was a Trump fan or another didn't believe in angels, they could join together without strife.

My friend saw this as a positive point. I see it as negative. To me, this does not express unity. This shows intolerance. These people

lived lives of "don't ask, don't tell," devoid of honesty. I don't think that is how God wants us to worship. God knows everything about us, and still he loves us. Perhaps one of us approves of Trump and another thinks Trump is the devil incarnate. One thinks angels flit all around while another scoffs at the idea. One might be right, another

might be wrong. God knows. Still he loves. So too should we love each other.

Instead, this church body chose to ignore its differences rather than accept them. In a way, the members lied to each other, wearing masks to look "presentable," throwing up a smokescreen of conformity. On the outside, they

could worship together. If the truth of their varying beliefs came out, however, they would crumble. They were a house split by an earthquake but plastered together with stucco. Pull away the façade and see the cracked foundation. It is for this reason that I dislike denominations.

In and of themselves, denominations aren't a bad thing. They're a form of shorthand, an easy way to express what one believes and to identify others who tend to agree with those beliefs.

At the same time, denominations also identify those who do not agree. They can take the form of labels and stereotypes. People may look at the denomination instead of the person claiming the denomination, making snap judgements that are more harmful than helpful. I've heard about "those Evangelicals," far too charismatic and shallow. I've heard that Baptists don't ever offer any substance to mature Christians, focusing solely on the salvation of non-Christians. I've heard that Calvinists aren't even Christians. Multiple times I've been asked if

Mennonites aren't actually cultists. (They're not, by the way.)

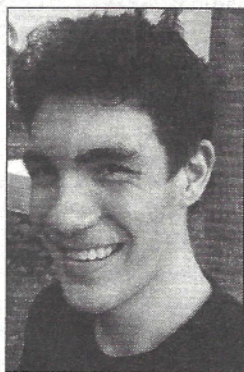
Denominations, in my experience, form dividing lines. They crack our house.

A cracked house does not sound like the unified body of Christ. It sounds like an "us versus them" mentality where those differing ideologies are at war with each other. They are stereotypes that don't account for every individual, yet judge all individuals the same.

Perhaps some Evangelicals are shallow. So are some Methodists. Yes, I've been to a hundred "you need to be saved" services at Baptist churches—but I've also been to Baptist services that answer the question of what to do after being saved. I've studied Calvinist ideology, heard about the "hyper Calvinists" and the "mellow Calvinists," and have concluded that many of their beliefs coincide with my own. I've concluded that my beliefs line up with the core tenets of plenty of denominations. We're more similar than we are different. I've worshipped with Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Mennonites, Calvinists, Catholics, and more. I've decided that the Mennonite focus on peace and a personal relationship with Christ most matches my focus.

I don't believe that forces me to be a Mennonite. Denominational labels put undue pressure on my identity. I am a Christian, plain and simple. I believe the good news. Jesus lived for us. Jesus died for us. Jesus rose again for us. If you believe that, you're a Christian, like me.

The rest is just details. Details aren't bad. They can be areas of discussion, of growth, of iron sharpening iron as we all work towards a better understanding of God and of each other. Details shouldn't be battle lines and camp divisions that tear our wedding gown or rip our limbs apart. Let us pull off our masks, reveal who we are, and love each other as God loves us. Let's have real unity in the midst of our diversity.



Luke Marshburn
Homestead Mennonite

Joan Le

March 30

Joan LeCotta Nicotri, 86, a resident of Florida City, Florida, passed away at her home on Monday, July 8, 2019, surrounded by her loving family. Born in Phoenix, New York, March 30, 1933, she was the daughter of late John and Angeline Zollo LeCotta. She was a graduate of Phoenix

Joan was a sport-leader person who enjoyed her friends would tell her girls in school, and through her grown-up years. She loved children, her sense of humor and attitude with Joan was never sessions, and having dancing, were well known.

Joan met the love of her life, John, in Mexico (New York) where she was a cheerleader for the Phoenix playing varsity basketball.

Joan and John were married in 1954. Soon after, they started a daughter, Julie. They lived in New York and were supporting her husband's locations.

In the late '60s, Joan moved to a New York farm, but continued also building a motel. John's brother Sam was selling the motel a few years on supporting her family, wife, and wonderful parties for family and friends were famous for their many other dishes served.

Joan was a devout Catholic and followed the Mass and followed the Pope. She had a great sense of humor when others had good attitude was contagious, happy, fun-loving spirit.

Joan and John took their children's career path and numerous trips together enjoyed the action. They moved to New York to follow their team, as family members thrilled with the company. She cherished her travels with her dear cousin Rosie W. in England, Scotland, Italy, and well.

Joan loved to read on world history and had a great interest in the daily news. She also loved the challenge of questions as possible.

Following some health issues, she went back to enjoy almost all her friends, who were recent health battles, and overcome. In the end, she was strong and ready. She was strong.

Her last days in hospital were consoling others and life she had lived, and together again one day. She was deeply loved by an angel in life, and

Obituary

Joseph P. Stingone, Sr.

March 30, 1933 - July 8, 2019

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our great friend, family member, and patriarch, Joseph P. Stingone, Sr., whom passed away early in the morning of Monday, July 8, 2019, surrounded by family and loved ones, he was 82 years young.

Joseph was born on July 17, 1936 to the late Alfonso and Mary Stingone in Bronx, New York.

Joseph is survived by his loving wife of 63 years, Barbara Stingone, his daughter Cynthia Geoghegan (William Harris), son Joseph Stingone, Jr. (Michelle Stingone), along with 6 grandchildren and

